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The Great Adventurer

By J. E. Sampter

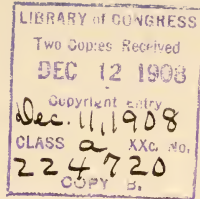
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To
J. L.

The Face of Life

The Face of Life

I

THE face of man passes like a shadow and a dream.
The face of man is like a cloud that glimmers and
passes from the sky.

It is like a cloud on fire with sunlight, a vapor, a frail
and accidental and surpassingly beautiful vision.

A man and a woman went forth by moonlight; they
knew the planetary forces; they loved, they lived
a rapturous moment of life; and, lo, there glim-
mered the face of a new man.

A troop of soldiers rushed through a town, and stole
its fairest daughter, and stupefied her and misused

her; and, lo, there glimmered the face of a new man.
A thoughtless couple was thoughtlessly united, for convenience and through the babbling force of many tongues; and, lo, there glimmered the face of a new man.

Like bubbles upon water, like clouds shaped by the wind, so shadowlike and accidental is a human face. Behold, this woman wept, and there came forth a dark face upon the world.

And behold, that woman laughed, and there came forth a face that shone like the morning.

And she that wept and she that laughed were but as clouds shining and darkling in the radiance of a fearful sun.

MY birth was an adventure.

No perilous voyage was so perilous, so strange,
so seemingly fabulous as my voyage to the
shores of life.

That Columbus reached America is not marvelous.

That Balboa looked upon the Pacific was at last inevitable.

But that I reached the shores of life is a great wonder.
Could I tell the mysteries and terrors I have seen upon
my voyage toward life, no man would believe me.

And yet everyone of those who would doubt has
traveled as mysterious and terrible a sea.

Eternity has been on this adventure with me; even as

eternity has been on its adventure with every momentary little cloud.

Accidents have swayed my course, poles have drawn me as if I were a magnet, ships have collided with me, and they sank, not I. No special fate watched over me. The course of all things carried me to my goal.

An adventure was my birth. An adventure, as perilous, as strange, as seemingly fabulous, shall be my life and death.

III

WAS it inevitable that this earth became a solid ball?

Was not that likewise a seeming chance of nature, an event dependent on every delicate force and balance of a multitude of stars?

And yet this I needed for my voyage.

I needed seas and continents, seas that are vaporous still, continents that are as creases upon a hardening ball of fire and granite.

I needed the little worm that is my grandfather, the little plant that is my foster-mother.

I needed the horrible struggles of creatures fighting for life. I needed the sharper claws of one creature,

or the keener, crueler wit of another creature.
For he of the sharper claws and the crueler wit was
the father of my fathers.

Behold, mountains were moved to let me pass. Behold,
men and women labored and loved and died,—
just as they did, and not otherwise—or else had
I not breathed.

Had not a million mothers suffered the throes of agony,
I could not sing to-day my songs of triumph.

Once fire is always fire. What was once a nebulous
flame upon this earth is now the lamp of my spirit
and the fire of my tongue.

IV

I PUT a question to life, and life gave me an answer. I reasoned therefrom, and asked the same question again. But it is another matter whether I am to receive the same answer.

I live upon a promise. In winter I live upon the promise of spring, and in spring I live upon the promise of autumn. Forever am I like a mother expecting the birth of her first child; forever like a bride awaiting the bridegroom. But I may die before night.

Is it all promise? Is nothing to be fulfilled? Am I like a querulous child to be quieted with false promises?

Is it to keep me from starving that you fill me with promises of bread?

Woe to me, I have missed the fulfillment! I did not see it.

While I was awaiting spring my window was brilliant with roses of frost and lilies of ice. While I was awaiting autumn the cherries were already ripe upon the trees. Behold, she who was awaiting her first child had him already in the stillness, closer than ever again. Behold, the bride awaiting her bridegroom hears his voice singing into her ears. Though the mother and bride die before night, yet are they no less mother and bride.

Outward fulfillment is the visible fulfillment which our spirit has already passed, is the husk ripened to fall

away. Within it is a new promise, again invisible.
The true fulfillment is the promise.

The fairest flower is that within the bud, still folded,
still perfect, still invisible.

How beautiful are the means of life! Hear men cry:
“The end justifies the means.”

I say to you: “The means justify the end.” Let ends
take care of themselves. I cannot alter them. My
power is in the means, my fairness lies in making
the means fair, my delight lies in making the means
delightful.

Mine only is this endless present, with its vision of the
past and future.

Most delightful of all present things, most living and
nearest to my soul, is just its promise of the future.

V

DO you hear out of the future years the sweet tremulous voices of many unborn children? As the dream and foreboding of next summer's singing birds, so come to me from the future their lisping songs and their playful high chatter and their soft wailings.

They are the children that may be born. They are the children that perhaps shall never be born.

What a chance it is, what a speculation on our moods and humors whether they shall ever sing and lisp and wail! They are indeed on a perilous adventure.

Generations of unborn children, generations of unborn fathers and mothers, fear not, despair not of birth,

for in one way or another your voices shall be heard;
they are heard already.

For the generations of unborn children are our children.

In our spirits they are singing already.

You are as inevitable as I have been, and every one of
you shall be born.

Sweet children, your voices shall be heard, though none
should be able to see you.

For the power that is in a man must go forward and
ripen in season; and if it cannot bear physical fruit,
it shall bear spiritual fruit.

Every man is a spring of the waters of life. The force
that is in him must pass onward, like the water
that is pouring from the mountains. Through the
calm, broad river or the seething narrow chasm,

in clouds or spray or cataract or subterranean stream, it must pour down to the sea. So the force of man, through body or spirit, through good or evil, pours down through the ages. Where there is room and passageway his children shall pass. One is the father of heroes and another is the father of prophecies.

Evil thoughts and dark ambitions, terrible creeds, sweet songs, truths of science and conventions of life, all these spiritual influences that are living among us and are stronger than the strongest men, what do you think they are? The spiritual children of men and women who lived generations ago.

VI

O STARS and planets, if you have been inevitable, so too have I, so too have all my brothers, the teeming multiform children of life, been just as inevitable. The force of all things in the universe, the balance of every star, the weight of every pebble, all, all, with not one grain of dust left out, bring forth by their vast workings and strugglings and inconsequent strong wills, the world as it is, the world as it must be. The whole of life, within itself, now, is the whole past and the whole future. Each moment is eternity. And only that whole life, that vast completeness, comprehends every moment of the past and future, of all time. In that whole I am

forever. From that whole I cannot be cast away. That on which I have moored my life may be swept from me by some vast current of antagonistic purpose. Like a barnacle fastened to a ship's side, I am forever fastened to something; like a barnacle, no matter where the ship may sail, there am I at home. But, lo, they scrape me from the ship. Then begins a new struggle and adventure. For me this separate adventure, for me this part, for me only this vision of the face of life.

Into the Depths

Into the Depths

I

I HEAR a voice, and I know my friend is near me. I behold a face, and I know it is the face of one I love. Shall I hear the voice of life, and see the face of life, and not believe that life is there?

I behold a green hill, and I believe that the upheaved rock is beneath it; I see the surface of a lake, and I believe there is a depth below. Such is my faith. I behold the surface and believe in the depth.

II

HAVE I ever doubted you, my brother, my limited, human, dear brother? Have I ever said: "Perhaps the face and the shape is all of you. Perhaps your seeming self is a picture"? No, but I have lived upon the sure knowledge of you, of your self.

When I was a baby, I looked into my mother's eyes, and saw my like, and had no fear. And when I looked later upon the flowers and stars and clouds, I looked into their eyes, and saw my like again, and had no fear.

And now, after long thought and experience, I know what it is that makes me love and trust you so well,

my human brother. It is the knowledge of the self within me that makes me love, that makes me trust the self in you.

If the voice of creation were to speak to me, saying, "I am," I could not understand the word unless it were spoken within myself, unless I myself experienced the universe.

My life is meaningless save for the self that creates and breathes therein. This alone is sure, is light, life and form. This is the great adventurer to whom all passing things are food and drink and treasure and an open path. And all that mystifies me, the wonderful unknown, is meaningless until I find therein the self that is more than myself, and yet that I myself must realize. I feel the universe as a self,

a myriad of selves in endless relation, that clash and seem to destroy one another, and know not that they are the same, even as the waves of the sea. I am a wave of the sea. I have come up from the depths, I shall go back to the depths; and my quick and fleeting life is this sparkle and curve and swift shape of a wave in the sunshine. But I am one with that boundless, multitudinous sea, with that whole existence, that prolific self, which is also within me, the upwelling of my own life—not thought or passion or feeling—but that which looks out and adventures through them all.

To myself I am the revealer of life, because I am alive. Life is the one certainty. And yet life is the one unknown. I learn more and more, but the mystery

grows no less. The flame makes all shapes clear
but its own shape. It illumines all things, but
knows not itself to be the light.

III

WHEN I, hungering and incomplete, I who need the whole world, who move therein as in a socket, I who feed on stars and seas and prairies and jungles, I who die each day and am born each day in the body, and yet shape myself ever according to my need and my spirit, when I doubt and question the self in life, the self that surrounds and fulfills me, I find myself suddenly in a world of dreams and pictures. When I doubt you, my human brother, I half slay myself. And when I doubt the self, the vital source of all life, I am shut out from my body and garden and vast shape, the universe. I can travel no more. My seas are dried up,

and my mountains are shattered, and I am confined
in the narrow bounds of my own shape.

For all shape is a dream and a vision and a picture; a
dream and a vision and a picture of the unseen
self. And out of my heart cries the love that is a
proof of my incompleteness.

IV

IF life is a sign, what is signified? If life is a dream, who is the dreamer? If life is a shadow, what is the substance?

I am the sign and the signified; I am the dream and the dreamer; I am the shadow and the substance.
I myself am the answer.

V

THE fruit of reason, no less than the fruit of feeling, is faith. In one age men get for their questions this answer: Jehovah; in another age this answer: Christ; in a third age, this answer: Nature. Each is an act of faith.

Different are the fruits of reason and feeling for each man. But their root is one.

Though the scientist believe that lightning is an electric flash, and the savage believe that it is a sign of the anger of gods, and though both may be wrong, yet both have seen and known the flash of lightning.

Every man who knows the wonder of life within him, and finds expression, however crude or false, knows

the truth. Though he clothe his body of truth in rags or silk, in feathers or paint, that body is still the same. His act of faith is a living thing; his form of faith is a dress.

SO far as man can know, nothing is ever destroyed; existence is change; change is eternal.
I am eternal; I am forever. But I am infinitely mortal.

I am born forever, I die forever, I am changed forever;
I know not what I may become, nor what I may have been.

According to the strength that is within me, for this eternal point of time that is called the present, I am free. I am a magnet and a blast of wind.

Each one of us is so much: A part of our whole selves, a part of all force, a part of all life and freedom.
The whole of self is the universe.

Even as the present moment is a part of eternity, and,
in a certain sense, is eternity itself.

VII

I HAVE come upward from the darkness of my baby soul, which knew all things darkly.

— And I would grow to include the seas and earth and heaven and all things, till the stars and planets and man among them should sing together in a universal light.

My love is a great love. My longing is without end. And to-day in its human shape it needs and wills all that is human. It sees itself as a part of the great human drama, as one among many, who are all me, mine; who shall live in relation to my will. I shall shape and mold the lives about me, according

to my might, not for my limited pleasure or satisfaction, but for my vision of that humanity.

I shall go beyond my pain and beyond my joy. As notes forget themselves in a melody, so shall I forget myself in the larger fullness of that human chant. Pain shall not affright me, where there is growth and adventure and love. I shall make life sweet and rhythmic where I can touch it, to be my life and my perfection.

I shall want life fair and open and true; and I shall be as one who looks down upon myself, and sees my own human shape and passage of life as part of a large drama of myself. I shall shape my life to fit into that drama of beauty as I long for it, just as I might wish to shape the life of another.

And so shall I be complete according to my light, by
living in and for all that I know and understand.
For all that I love and know is a part of me, and my
completeness.

VIII

I KNOW not why or how I was separated from the world, but I know that my longing is to be united once more. Am I not, even now, united? I believe that now, in this life, if anywhere, that union should be realized.

This one experience called human life and human death can be lived and died in the spirit of a world, in manifold adjustment with all other worlds. Like a planet or star in the vast system I shall feel and know every vibration from all space and time. The universe shall be myself, and in that perfection alone shall I be perfect; in relation to the vast plan shall I move and be myself. And yet like a world,

with its attraction, shall I attract and sway all things, shall I keep myself whole and strong, a force among the forces of life. I shall be so poised, so centred, that I shall touch life at every point, and hold it and shape it with my will.

IX

SOME are sculptors of marble and some are casters of bronze and some are molders of wax. The great art-master has given each of us a different material. We cannot choose. But each of us is free to choose and create a form of beauty, according to his own light, and each of us knows that the form shall be destroyed again and again, and melted for new uses. However we plan and work, unconsciously we are making images of our self. And because our self is forever changing, therefore does each image, as soon as it is finished, become a false image, to be recast. Some lose with sorrow their beautiful images; some, though they conceive beauty, cannot stamp it upon

the face of their mold; some behold with horror that they have conceived and wrought ugliness and falsehood.

But ever the sculptor remains, and ever the great art-master brings new and strange substances.

X

MY great art-master is my creative spirit. It is stern, it is single-minded; it bids me waste nothing and withhold nothing.

If I defied this master spirit, I were like a planet that lost its strength of gravity, and divided into a thousand insufficient and uncertain particles.

Till death divide me, while I stand thus crystallized in the shape of human life, I would have my will and purpose as single, as individual, as separate as the shape that is my body.

Daring, self-contained and free is this warm body in its world of fluid shapes. It shall be cold. It shall crumble. It shall plunge into the terrible sea of

boundless re-creation. And I am that body, I am that life, one with all others through endless interchange. Each smallest shape is universal because it is related with all energies forever. I am the strong master of myself, the zenith of my own life. And yet I am nobly and magnificently dependent, the child and lover of my vast self through life and through death. I am myself because I am much more than myself. I am myself because I lose myself forever. One law spreads out the oceans and holds the drop of water in its perfect globe. I will to live intact. Through life and into death I shall follow my particular, finite, splendid love, without fear or sight, as a planet or star follows its unseen course in the track of its own will. I

shall devote myself to my course, to my chosen path of life. My whole soul, my whole life and will to this adventure, while it lasts, and to the next adventure, if it come! I shall give myself wholly, or withhold myself wholly. I shall not choose that which will let me live, but live or die for that which I choose.

For my creative spirit is a child of the vast world. It knows that infinite circles sweep onward in strong and definite lines.

XI

SHIP of life, I am dizzy, dancing over the waves. Now on the crest of one, I pray to stay there, to reel forever on that sunny, life-giving height. Now in the hollow of one, I pray to sink to the very depths.

There, surely, in the stillness, in the depths, are no more dizzy changes, no motion, nothing but changelessness and dead calm.

But from the shore and the continents I hear jagged mountain-tops crying aloud.

They cry: "We were once in the deepest depths of the sea. Behold, how we have risen! Nowhere is changelessness; nowhere is dead calm."

I know a deeper depth and a higher height. I know
a depth that is not reached by sinking. I know a
height that is not reached by rising.

It is the innermost self, the one known, the one un-
knowable.

XII

FACE of man, nearest face, just awakened, splendid, changing, dying face, you cannot hide from me the self that I know. Through the changing cloud, through the shifting wave, through the passing face I recognize myself.

XIII

BEHIND me is darkness, before me is a deep pit. I plunge into the night, as I have done forever. And lo, about me is the radiance of my own light. The darkness is my friend, the night is my mother. I lean upon empty space; I step smiling into the darkness. For do not the planets and stars lean upon empty space? And does not darkness spread forth their fire?

I love the fearful world. I trust the unknown, because it is the whole of myself. The space holds me; and the darkness spreads a great light. For this is the bottomless pit and the roofless heaven, and in it I am forever.



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